

## **TASK FORCE ON CHILDREN'S JUSTICE**

The Children's Division was awarded \$345,844 during FFY 03, and again in FFY 04, in federal funds through the Children's Justice Act to address the investigative, administrative, and judicial handling of child abuse, especially child sexual abuse. As part of the grant requirements, the state must establish and maintain a multi-disciplinary task force to assess the state's child abuse system and to recommend enhancements or changes to Missouri's child welfare policy and practice. The Task Force consists of a diverse group of 21 professionals affiliated with the child protection system, including health, mental health professionals, parent representatives, law enforcement officials, attorneys, judges, legislators, and other child advocates. The Task Force receives staff support from the Children's Division and the Office of State Courts Administrator. The Task Force was newly reformed in 2004, and is divided into three subcommittees; Finance, Legislative, and Training Committees. The Task Force meets, at minimum, on a quarterly basis, and serves as one of three citizen review panels for the State. The reformed Task Force is currently undergoing new strategic planning aiming to better accomplish its mission.

Historically, the Task Force has invited presenters from various state organizations to present agency's policies as they related to child welfare. This gave the Task Force the opportunity to both learn the policies and the opportunity to make suggestions on improvements.

One of the numerous projects initiated by the Task Force is helping to fund Finding Words Missouri Training. Finding Words is a model process which instructs Children's Service Workers, Juvenile Court Officials, and Law Enforcement on proper techniques and strategies when forensically interviewing a child victim of an abuse or neglect situation. The Task Force has also regularly funded Colleagues for Children, a informative newsletter for mandated reporters published by Prevent Child Abuse Missouri. Additionally, funded regularly were multiple conferences or trainings across the State attended by professionals directly involved in child welfare issues.

A funding history of the Task Force for the past 5 years is included in Section 11 CJA Plan and Expenditures.